

SECOND AMENDMENT

"This meant that the only two local police were at least 25 minutes away from Port Arthur. Very convenient. I don't know when, where, or who rang and alerted the police to this so-called heroin haul..."

"I know it should have been on tape. But I went to Hobart about a week after the shooting to a meeting of the ambulance service. A comment was made to me that the tape recordings of the day's events had been accidentally wiped. The chap who told me was a senior ambulance officer. I traveled with him to the meeting, and it was during this journey that I was given this information."

In addition, according to freelance journalist Joe Vialls, closing the swing bridge at Dunalley "would also prevent anyone from leaving the Peninsula, including those involved in executing the massacre at Port Arthur." But because the Dunalley-based officer was called away, "the bridge remained open to traffic after the massacre, and several people are known to have left Port Arthur and escaped across that swing bridge..."

If Martin Bryant was too incompetent to plan and execute this complicated scenario alone, then there was at least one other person who helped Bryant by diverting the police from the Café and providing Bryant more time. Who was

that person? Did he use the swing bridge at Dunalley to make good his escape?

BRYANT'S EXIT TO SEASCAPE

What is known about the events following the carnage at the Broad Arrow Café, is that Bryant, upon leaving the café, switched from the .223 Colt AR-15 semi-automatic rifle used inside the café to his other rifle, a .308 Fabrique Nationale FAL semi-automatic, and fired several shots.

He then drove 100 yards to the toll booth at the Port Arthur historic site, shot four people inside a gold BMW, and exchanged vehicles. He drove another 200 yards to a service station, blocked off a Toyota Corolla driven by Glen Pears, and took Pears hostage at gunpoint, forcing him into the trunk of the BMW. As Pears' female companion Zoe Hall attempted to get into the driver's seat and make her escape, Bryant shot her.

Bryant drove the BMW five kilometers to the Seascapes Cottage, a holiday accommodation with the back of the property facing the ocean at Long Bay. Bryant set fire to the BMW and took Pears into the main building.

A state of siege ensued upon the arrival of the police. Police superintendents Barry Bennett and Bob Fielding discussed the Seascapes siege in the March 1997

issue of the *Association of South Australia Police Journal*. They noted: "There was some suggestion that there may be two suspects. It appeared at one stage that two gunmen or some people or hostages at Seascapes were exchanging gunfire with the gunmen as there appeared to be shots coming from two separate buildings..." (emphasis ours).

According to autopsy reports, two of the hostages—the elderly couple who owned and operated Seascapes, David and Sally Martin—were killed early on Sunday, before Bryant had even driven into the Port Arthur area. According to the official Court transcripts, the burned corpse of the third hostage, Glen Pears, was recovered with his hands secured behind his body with a pair of handcuffs.

It is highly unlikely that Martin Bryant, alone, could have been shooting from several buildings at once, while spending the time he did on the phone with the hostage negotiators.

With all three of Bryant's hostages accounted for, and no one else found in the buildings at Seascapes besides Bryant, who was the other gunman?

By early the next morning, smoke was seen billowing from the building, forcing Bryant out, his back on fire and into police custody.

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and 18 were seriously wounded.

Twelve days after Bryant's shooting spree, massive new restrictions were imposed on the civilian possession and use of firearms—restrictions specifically designed to reduce the number of lawfully owned guns in the hands of Australians.

It was a scenario all too familiar to American gun-owners. A high-profile shooting occurs and new laws are demanded—laws designed to render civilian firearm possession all the more difficult.

With Port Arthur, however, many Australians suspect that the firearm-prohibitionists weren't willing to leave anything to chance.

Fueling the fires of suspicion, major discrepancies in the official accounts of the Port Arthur massacre surfaced in the years that followed and charges of cover-up and conspiracy were leveled against the Australian government. Even if the exact details may never be known with certainty, some light may be shed by examining whether Martin Bryant was capable of acting alone.

Invalid pension. It was granted because of Bryant's mental deficiencies, that he had been unable to hold a job and was incapable of managing his own affairs. In addition to his pension, he had been left a legacy of over one million dollars.

If Bryant had co-conspirators who made themselves scarce after his

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actions, then might not their motive be the facilitation of a political agenda? Sufficient evidence now exists in the public record to strongly suggest that Bryant could not have acted alone, either in planning or in executing the massacre. Charges of a conspiracy designed to stampede Australians into surrendering their guns becomes all the more credible.

dispatching of the only available police officers to far away Saltwater River?

Without any suggestion that the phone call might have been used as a diversionary tactic, the reference appears in the official report of Commissioner of Police Richard McCreadie. He noted only that "the local police were at the Saltwater River area..."

There was neither any further interest, nor any follow-up investigation of the origins of that anonymous phone call.

Wendy Scurr was the first one to call in the report of the shootings to the police and is a senior instructor at St. John Ambulance. In her spare time, she worked as a volunteer with the Tasmanian Ambulance Service in the Port Arthur area. About the anonymous phone call, Scurr said, "I became aware that the only two local police were dispatched to Saltwater River. I was chatting to the Nubeena policeman and he told me where he was when the shooting began. His name is Paul Hyland. The other policeman was stationed at Dunalley. He would back up Hyland as they were told heroin (soap powder) was found at Saltwater River."

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GUILTY UNTIL PROVEN INNOCENT

The events following Bryant's capture should be familiar to most American gun-owners. The Australian media, in lock-step, condemned Bryant as guilty without any evidence. Because semi-automatic firearms were used, the firearm-prohibitionists and their allies in media and the government pulled out all the stops to ban these firearms.

Bryant's lawyers accepted the premise that he was guilty of all charges. At his court appearance on September 30, 1996, Bryant pleaded "not guilty" to each of the 72 charges leveled against him. That decision was untenable for David Gunson, one of Bryant's legal representatives, who was replaced by John Avery. Although Bryant never made a detailed confession concerning the Broad Arrow murders, Avery eventually persuaded Bryant to plead guilty. That guilty plea was entered in court on November 7, 1996.

On November 19, the first day of the court proceedings involving Bryant's sentencing, Avery stated to the court: "Your Honour nothing that I can say on behalf

of my client can mitigate the outrageous nature of his conduct." At a subsequent speech delivered at the University of Tasmania law school, Avery stated: "I felt intensely that I had to do right by the community as well."

Here are just a few of the astonishing irregularities and discrepancies that, at the very least, should have been pursued by Bryant's lawyers:

- Eyewitnesses were not interviewed when it became known that their stories would conflict with the government account.

- A credible time-line that connects Bryant to the killing of the Martins at Seascope, and still allows him to arrive early enough at the Broad Arrow to buy and eat lunch before the carnage, was never established. If he didn't kill the Martins, then who did?

- No forensic evidence of Bryant's physical presence at the Broad Arrow was ever established. Because Bryant's face was subsequently plastered throughout Australia, all eyewitness identification was contaminated. Why didn't Avery pursue the discrepancies in the descriptions of clothing Bryant was reported to have worn at different stages during the carnage?

- In direct violation of the Australian constitution, Prime Minister John Howard

suggested that a Coroner's Inquest was not required and called for the immediate demolition of the Broad Arrow Cafe. Although the survivors clamored for more information, Howard used the pretext that more information would be too painful for them to bear.

Bryant's financial resources would have permitted his lawyers to hire as many private investigators and psychiatrists as necessary to defend him, yet they failed to do so.

On November 22, Bryant was sentenced to life in prison.

Are all these discrepancies and unanswered questions just the result of coincidence and official ineptitude? Or were the lives of 35 innocent victims sacrificed for the sake of politics?

In the course of researching the Port Arthur shootings, the more we learned, the more questions we found without answers.

One thing seems irrefutable: the Australian government was—and still is—afraid of the truth.

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